

What makes a difference between two schools? Teacher job satisfaction and educational outcomes

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This article examines the interplay between school factors and teacher job satisfaction that influences educational outcomes by comparing two Non-governmental Organisation (NGO) schools in Cambodia. This small-scale qualitative case study was conducted over a period of eight weeks in 2005 in two NGO schools in a suburb of Phnom Penh. The findings show that teacher job satisfaction is crucially influenced by remunerative incentives such as salary level and welfare conditions. However, job satisfaction is also intertwined with non-remunerative incentives such as school management, principal leadership, professional development, and a meaningful sense of life through teaching. That is, both remunerative and non-remunerative incentives are associated with teacher job satisfaction. However, according to different school conditions, either remunerative or non-remunerative incentive is more prioritised by teachers. Finally, the different job satisfaction between the two faculties seems to result in the educational gap such as student enrolment rates and achievement between the schools.

Teacher job satisfaction, school factors, educational outcomes, Cambodia, NGO schools

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to reveal school factors that have a significant impact on teacher job satisfaction in non-formal primary education settings. Considering the educational situations of developing countries like Cambodia where school-related factors are more significant than non-school factors in determining student achievement, teacher quality has a crucial impact on pupils' academic performance (Mwamwenda and Mwamwenda, 1989; Lockheed and Verspoor, 1991). More importantly, teacher quality is inextricably intertwined with teachers' perception on their work life (Perry, Chapman, and Snyder, 1995). Therefore, teacher job satisfaction is often regarded as a significant determinant on the educational outcomes such as enrolment and achievement. Indeed, literature on teacher job satisfaction has consistently shown a significant relationship between teacher job satisfaction and student achievement (Heller, Rex, and Cline, 1992; Leslie, 1989). For this reason, research has continuously attempted to identify various factors influencing teacher job satisfaction (Bein, Anderson, and Maes, 1990; Clarke and Keating, 1995; Rossmiller, 1992).

Despite the previous research, relatively little attention has been paid to the discussions about teacher job satisfaction in the non-formal education settings of Cambodia, which is identified by teachers' voice. As such, it was hoped that the findings of this study would contribute to the literature on teacher job satisfaction in non-formal primary education settings in developing countries as well as advise the direction of educational policy-making.

RESEARCH BACKGROUNDS

Over the last decade, Cambodia has achieved remarkable jumps in primary school enrolments. According to the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport of Cambodia, primary school enrolments in 1996/7 were 1,918,985 and this proceeded to 2,747,080 in 2003/2004 (Bray and Bunly, 2005, p.19). To achieve this educational outcome, many NGO schools have been in active in Cambodia. As of 1999, there are more than 250 local NGOs and 200 international NGOs and most of them

are closely related to development issues including education (ADB, 1999, p.5). According to Bray and Bunly (2005), NGOs and external donor agencies provide 18.0 per cent of the total resources for primary education whereas the government provides 12.5 per cent of the entire costs for primary education in Cambodia. For this reason, NGO schools in developing countries like Cambodia are often regarded as crucial alternatives to overcome state failure in the provision of basic education. Indeed, recent research (Sukontamarn, 2004; Khan, 2003; Sakya, 2000 etc.) shows the positive impact on educational outcomes of NGO schools in developing countries.

Despite this general success of NGO schools in enrolment in primary education, there are various gaps in educational outcomes among them because NGO schools in Cambodia are not homogenous in terms of origin, capacity, modus operandi of organisation, etc. Even the NGO schools in this study that are located in the same community called “Bassac Village” have shown significantly different educational outcomes in enrolment rate and achievement. Furthermore, one of the schools showed frequent teacher absence during the research period.

These phenomena lead the researcher to question the school factors affecting teacher job satisfaction because the researcher noticed the outside conditions surrounding the schools are quite similar in terms of community support, community environments, and family background of pupils.¹

RESEARCH METHOD

This was a small-scale qualitative case study based on a comparative analysis of the two NGO schools in a peri-urban area of Phnom Penh, Cambodia. A case study approach was used as the main research method because it was hoped that the researcher would pursue the teachers’ perceptions and voices. This study also chose two NGO schools in a purposive fashion by comparable case selection in the sense that NGO schools in Cambodia are not homogenous (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). By doing so, it was intended to reveal how the different school factors have an impact on forming diverse teacher views of job satisfaction.

This case study consisted of classroom observations, surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. Based on a comparative perspective, major school factors that affect job satisfaction were compared by concrete categories. This study involved eleven primary school teachers in the NGO schools—to protect personal information involved in this study, the two pseudonyms “Bassac River School” and “Naga School” were used throughout this study—where the researcher participated for eight weeks in 2005. No teachers were married (six females and five males). Nine out of eleven teachers finished grade twelve (one female teacher finished grade nine and one male teacher currently studies in a college). The schools are not far from the center of Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. It takes at most 15 minutes to travel from the center of Phnom Penh to the schools by motorbike, which is one of the main modes of transportation of Phnom Penh. Under this situation, the researcher could visit the two schools five days a week during the first three weeks of research.

During the first week, the researcher observed classroom activities from kindergarten to grade three and conducted unstructured interviews with teachers and principals in the schools. The researcher also reviewed in-house documents such as attendance roll books, textbooks, school reports, student information report, statistical data of the schools, etc. By doing so, the researcher decided the most appropriate research methods including semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. From the second week to the seventh week, 41 girls and 32 boys in grade three from the two schools were invited to take the same standardised test (Khmer and math)² in order to compare student achievements between the schools. Each examination paper consisted of 20 objective questions that were made by four teachers from the schools. Based on the test results,

¹ The similarities of the community conditions surrounding the schools will be detailed in the sections of findings.

² The students who took the test use the same textbooks, which were distributed by UNICEF.

the researcher identified that there is a big gap between the schools in terms of educational outcomes. As such, this study had a “suspense structure” as well as “comparative structure” to investigate how the different educational outcomes were attained by comparing the schools (Yin, 1989). Along with this, the researcher conducted a basic survey that reveals students’ socio-economic status during the period. In addition, 22 interviews with eleven teachers (four teachers from Bassac River School and seven teachers from Naga School) were conducted. Each teacher was interviewed twice for more than an hour at a time. After the first interview with teachers, a short survey was conducted about teacher job satisfaction based on 5-point Likert scale. At the same period, a focus group consisting of all teachers from the two schools was organised to discuss their perspectives on their job satisfaction. Focus group discussions were conducted twice for four hours and teachers’ perceptions on their job were asked and discussed. During the last week of the research, the researcher obtained feedback from teachers by debriefing what the researcher found. In interpreting Khmer, one interpreter who can speak both Khmer and Korean (the researcher’s native language) was involved throughout this study. He works for an NGO, which has financially supported Bassac Village over the last three years. He also helped the researcher to understand the test papers.

FINDINGS

As stated earlier, out-of-school factors influencing the schools are quite similar in terms of community support, community environments, and family background of pupils. Before going further to analyse the cause of the different school performance, it is necessary to detail the similar community conditions surrounding the schools. The two schools are located in the same village. Many houses in the village are illegally built, which are not authorised by the government, as a result, many houses do not have electricity and water. Most houses were also hurriedly built because most people in the village came from rural areas to make a living or some of them are refugee from Vietnam. Within this context, Table 1 summarises the similarity of the schools in terms of a family background.

Table 1. Family Background of Pupils (from Grade 1 to Grade 3)

Schools	Bassac River		Naga	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Monthly income of parents including supporters like relatives and neighbors	22.05 US	6.2	20.57 US	6.13
Family Structure		9		
Mother and Father	47 (72.3%)		116 (78.3%)	
Single father	1 (1.5%)		2 (1.3%)	
Single mother	8 (12.3%)		21 (14.2%)	
Orphan supported by neighbors or relatives	9 (13.8%)		9 (6.1%)	

Note. The data about family structure were retrieved from in-house documents (Bassac N = 65 and Naga N = 148). A survey was conducted to obtain the data about the income of parents and 21 pupils’ survey was not retrieved (Bassac N = 52 and Naga N = 140). US \$ is also used as a main currency in Cambodia (1 US \$ = 4,000 Riel).

Based on a t-test, there was no significant difference in the monthly average income of parents between the schools. In terms of family structure, most of the pupils live with their parents, but approximately 28 per cent of Bassac pupils and 22 per cent of Naga pupils suffer the loss of their father or mother. According to the principals of the two schools, most of pupils’ parents are temporary daily workers (e.g. construction workers), motorbike drivers, self-employed (e.g. grocery store, water store, and stationery store), and vendors (e.g. books, food, shells, and clothes). Also, some of them are unemployed and only a few are regular workers. Although there was no official data about the length of education of the parents, both teachers in the schools pointed out that most of pupils’ parents are illiterates. This implies that the length of education of the parents is likely to be less than six years. In addition, as far as community environments are concerned, there was no crucial difference between the schools because the Bassac village is a poverty-stricken village where most people live in miserable conditions on less than one dollar a day. Not surprisingly, most parents of the pupils enrolled in the schools can not afford to send

their children to public schools. At most 10 per cent of the school-age children in the village are enrolled in the public schools.³ Thus, it can be argued that the outside conditions surrounding the two schools are almost the same.

Under these circumstances, most people take the lack of resources to support the schools for granted at the community level. Even though Bassac River School was established by the governing body of the community, there was no particular fund allocated for the school because the governing body heavily relied on external donors. In the case of Naga School, since it was set up by an external religious organisation, there was no community connection as well. Rather, Naga School pays 75 US dollars for rental fee per month to the governing body of the community for the land of school buildings. In this context, the schools are expected to be financially self-sustaining. For these reasons, both the schools have internal regulations in managing the schools, which are quite free from the regulation of the government's educational policy. In brief, all these conditions allowed the researcher to concentrate on school factors.

Interestingly, despite the similar community conditions surrounding the schools, the two schools showed strikingly different school performance in terms of gender equity. Based on the investigation of student attendance books, significant differences of girls' drop-out rate and enrolment rate were identified.

Table 2. Enrolment and Drop-out Rates (from Grade 1 to Grade 3)⁴

	Bassac River School		Naga School	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
School enrolments	25	40	80	68
School enrolments rate of girls to boy	62.5%	100%	117.6%	100%
Drop-out pupils (up to Grade 3)	18	26	14	10
Rate of drop-out pupils to school enrolments	72.0%	65.0%	17.5%	14.7%

As seen in Table 2, there was an obvious gap in both school enrolment rates of girls and the number of drop-out between the two schools. Compared to the school enrolment rates of girls to boys in Bassac River School (62.5%), Naga School shows a higher school enrolments rate of girls to boys (117.6%). Additionally, girls who could not complete their third grade in Bassac River School were surprisingly 72.0 per cent of the total girls, compared to 17.5 per cent of Naga School. In brief, Naga School showed a better school performance than Bassac School in terms of both enrolment and drop-out rates of girls.

Furthermore, there was a significant achievement gap between the two schools. 72 pupils (21 pupils from Bassac River School and 51 pupils from Naga School) in grade three from the two schools were invited to take the same standardised examinations (Khmer and math) to compare pupils' achievements.⁵ As illustrated in Table 3, there was a significant difference of student achievement between the schools. The result shows that the pupils in Bassac River School lag behind the peers in Naga Schools in terms of both Khmer ($t = -4.458, p < 0.001$) and math ($t = -4.010, p < 0.001$).

There was another gap related to teachers. During the second to the third week of the research, a short survey about job satisfaction was conducted. It was based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 never satisfied and 5 very much satisfied). The result represented that the job satisfaction of Naga School teachers was much higher than that of Bassac River School teachers: Bassac River School (M 1.75 and SD 0.95) and Naga School (M 4.57 and SD 0.53).

³ This estimated measure is based on the interview with the principals of the two schools.

⁴ Both of the schools provide a curriculum from kindergarten to grade three. In this table, the 50 kindergarten pupils in the two schools were excluded because this study focused on primary education. Also, the drop-out pupils here means pupils who did not attend the schools more than 6 months once they enrolled the schools.

⁵ Originally, 43 girls and 32 boys were enrolled in the third grade in the schools but three pupils were absent from the schools when the pupils were invited to take the test.

Table 3. Student Achievement between the Schools

	Bassac River School (N=21)			Naga School (N=51)			t	Sig. (2-tailed)
	M	SD	SE	M	SD	SE		
Khmer	55.95	9.70	2.11	66.57	8.97	1.25	-4.458	.000
Math	48.57	10.97	2.39	58.24	8.54	1.19	-4.010	.000

DISCUSSIONS: WHAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE?

Then, what school factors make a difference between the schools? Table 4 shows the similarities and differences of school factors between the schools. In particular, the shaded parts indicate the differences between the schools that possibly make a difference in forming teacher job satisfaction.

Table 4. School Factors (Physical Conditions and Management)

Factors	Sub-factors	Bassac River School	Naga School
Physical Conditions	School size (by enrolment)	100 (Girl 40, Boy 60)	173 (Girl 89, Boy 84)
	Teacher-Student Ratio	1: 25.0	1:24.7
	Age of enrolled pupils	Average 8.26 Range 4 -14	Average 9.39 Range 4 -14
	Classroom	2 classrooms, 1 multi-purpose room	3 classrooms, 1 multi-purpose room
	Other facilities	1 teachers' room shared with the administration office of Bassac Village)	1 small front yard for school assembly
	Major classroom facilities	Desk, chair, teacher cabinet, and whiteboard	Desk, chair, teacher cabinet, whiteboard, and fan
	Quality of facilities	Very worn out building made by wood	Shabby tin-roofed buildings
Management	School origin	Established by community and external donors	Set up by a external religious organisation
	Grade	From kindergarten to Grade 3	From kindergarten to Grade 3
	PTA	Nominal PTA	None
	School expenditure per month	Data not accessed	960 US dollars (on average)
	Tuition fee and materials fee	Free	Free
	Free meals	No school meals	School meals provided twice a day
	Independence from central government	Independent	Independent
	Admission criteria	Admit by residence	Admit by residence
	Number of school shifts	1	2
	Number of class days	5 days a week and 2 vacations (about 90 days)	6 days a week and no vacation and extracurricular activity for street children every Friday late afternoon
	Educational background of principal	Primary school graduate	University graduate
Degree of principal emphasis on pupils' attendance	Strong but the first priority in school management is to draw fund from external donors	Very strong and the first priority in school management	
Principal leadership	Authoritarian leadership	Authoritative leadership	

In terms of the physical conditions of the schools, although there are some differences in the number of classrooms, particular facilities (teachers' room and front yard), and enrolments between the schools, those conditions did not make a difference in shaping job satisfaction.

Considering the circumstances of Bassac Village, the facilities of school are not bad. (Teacher 1, Naga School)

That is, the worn-out physical conditions of their school are evident problems but it did not have a significant impact on teachers' motivation. Most teachers in both schools complained about the

lack of physical resources, which was continuously highlighted by teachers during the research, but also they were already accustomed to teaching in this situation.

My school always lack materials like stationery and facilities like toilets. Obviously those things are inconvenient for teaching and learning. But also we have been always accustomed to this situation (Teacher 3, Bassac River School).

However, the conditions of school management made a difference teacher job satisfaction between the schools. Ostensibly, Bassac River School seemed to take advantage of community support because it has a PTA.

Nonetheless, the school has a difficulty in promoting the residents of Bassac Village to join its activities because most residents are struggling for a living. Under this lack of interest and involvement from the community, the PTA was an organisation in name only. This situation also influenced the principal leadership of Bassac School. That is, all decision power was given to the principal. Not surprisingly, the PTA does not have any legislative or advisory activities. For this reason, some of the teachers in Bassac River School complained about the management by the principal.

The principal emphasises collateral affairs, for example, reception for donors/visitors or some paper works, more than the everyday life of teachers and our pupils (Teacher 1, Bassac River School).

The apathy of the principal also made the Bassac teachers feel frequently frustrated in managing school affairs. The teachers believed that their voices and perspectives of education have been neglected.

I feel like my opinions about administration and management are always ignored (Teacher 3, Bassac River School).

Thus, the teachers of Bassac viewed that their principal should pay attention to education itself and should be learned about “what good education is” (Teacher 3, Bassac River School). This connotes that there is a gap about the perception of good education between the teachers and the principal. Furthermore, the teachers felt that they are usually treated as passive implementers according to the principal’s decision.

In the case of Naga School, the teachers work six days a week without a vacation throughout year. In addition, Naga School runs two shifts to accommodate 173 enrolments. In these respects, it seemed that Naga teachers work harder than Bassac teachers. However, six out of seven Naga teachers were satisfied with their current working conditions because they think that they have autonomy to some extent in conducting their duty. Like the Bassac principal, the principal of Naga School also made decisions all about school management such as number of class days a year, teachers’ salary level, school shifts, school meal programs, teacher appointment, etc. However, the principal never supervised teaching styles or teaching methods of the teachers. As such, developing curriculum was thought of as teachers’ role in Naga School. These seemed to make the teachers feel relative autonomy in their job.

Most important decisions have been made by him alone, but it is his own part. My responsibility is to teach and care well for my pupils (Teacher 4, Naga School).

In addition, the Naga principal is financially supportive for the teachers’ day-to- day life and put pupils’ attendance first in school management. More importantly, transparent school spending clarified by the Naga principal seems to encourage the teachers to work hard. In fact, Naga School spends on average 960 US dollars per month in school management.⁶ Hence, the style of

⁶ According to the Naga principal, on average 960 US dollars are spent a month in school management: teachers’ salary (\$310), teachers’ accommodation and food (\$255), free school meals (\$200), utility fees for School (\$20), rental fee for the land of three classrooms (\$75), traffic expenses for teachers (\$70), and scholarship for teachers

principal leadership should be noted as an important factor for understanding teacher job satisfaction. In brief, their job satisfaction is crucially intertwined with school management. This means that non-remunerative factors such as management style, principal leadership, and administrative procedure are also important to teacher job satisfaction.

Table 5 presents other school factors related to job satisfaction: classroom activities and welfare conditions. In terms of classroom activities, there was no significant difference between the schools. The only difference was whether there is a co-operative activity among teachers such as team teaching. The teachers in Naga School did co-operative work for the extra-curricular activities for their pupils and street children who are either orphans or poor children. Every Friday late afternoon, they taught Khmer, songs, dances, painting, and the Bible. Also, they provided food and basic medical service on a rental ship. To this end, they had a regular meeting at the teachers' dormitory and developed a special curriculum and learning materials. This extra-curricular activity played an important role in gathering other teachers' experience and knowledge about teaching. Through this co-operative work, they "understand their colleagues" and "feel they are contributing to something meaningful values" through their job (Teacher 6, Naga School).

Table 5. School Factors (Classroom Activities and Welfare Conditions)

Factors	Sub-factors	Bassac River School	Naga School
Classroom activities	Instructional materials	Textbooks (distributed by UNICEF), exercise book, and chalkboard	Textbook (distributed by UNICEF), exercise book, and chalkboard
	Instructional time	50-minute class time and 10-minute break (08:00 – 10:00)	50-minute class time and 10-minute break (08:00 – 11:00 and 14:00 – 17:00)
	Major pedagogy type	Whole class teaching	Whole class teaching
	Co-operative work for classroom activities	None	Once a week for extra-curricular activities
	Frequency of testing pupils' achievements	Once a month	Once a month
Welfare conditions for teachers	Salary level	No salary, only basic material support (e.g., food, accommodation, and transport allowance)	Salary from 35 to 55 dollars based on years of teaching besides 25 dollars per teacher for allowance
	Transport for teacher	1 motorbike shared with the village office	2 motorbikes only for teachers
	Other welfare systems	None	Dormitory and scholarships for teachers
	Opportunities of in-service training	None	None
	Job security and status	Volunteering, temporal, and part-time job	Full time job

Another distinctive school factor affecting teacher job satisfaction was welfare conditions for teachers. Obviously, salary was the most important incentive for teachers' morale in the schools. Related to this, the teachers of Bassac River School complained about their job status.

I am basically volunteering as a teacher. Although the village office provides basic materials such as transport allowance, food, and temporary accommodation located in the village. But those things are not enough (Teacher 3, Bassac River School).

The principal regards me as only a volunteering teacher, not a real teacher (Teacher 1, Bassac River School).

The difference between "a volunteering teacher" and "a real teacher" is not only semantic but also substantive in Bassac teachers' work life. Then, why do Bassac teachers continue to work as a volunteer teacher? Despite no official salary for the teachers, they had their own reasons to

maintain their job status. In the case of male teachers, they believed that teaching experience in Bassac River Schools will be helpful to transfer to other jobs in the government, NGOs, or a paid job at other non-formal school in the future. Unlike their male colleagues, the female teachers in Bassac River School viewed their job as somewhat a symbolic status rather than a practical one. In other words, though they did not get paid, they accept their position as a “decent profession” because the labor market for females in Cambodia is quite underdeveloped. Noticeably, the Bassac teachers overlooked the significant educational issues such as in-service training, curriculum, pupils’ learning, or teaching methods because they were dominated by the issue of salary.

In contrast to the Bassac teachers, the Naga teachers were satisfied with their salary level and their job security.

Compared to other jobs such as police or public school teachers, my salary is not small. Also, public school teachers have to sell learning materials to pupils and force pupils to have private tutorials in order for teachers to make a side income. But I don’t need to do that (Teacher 1, Naga School).

Because of this different job status, there was a clear difference about future career between the teachers. Three out of four teachers of Bassac River School regard their current job as a temporal one. They did not consider teaching itself as their lifelong career. In contrast, five out of seven teachers at Naga School desired to teach continuously and the teachers also hoped to get a degree or a license related to teaching profession.

Within this context, when the teachers in the two schools were asked “what do you need first for teaching better?,” the teachers answered differently as well. Three out of four Bassac teachers stated that they need more material resources and support including teachers’ salary from the village. In the case of Naga School, five out of seven teachers require themselves to be professionally trained as a teacher by obtaining opportunities for in-service trainings and degree programs. The five teachers believe that there is no professional teacher at Naga School and thus they need more knowledge about teaching methods to “be good teacher.” In brief, whereas the Bassac teachers see salary as the most important satisfaction factor, the Naga teachers view opportunities for career development as the most crucial satisfaction factors along with salary.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The teachers in both of the schools regard salary as the key remunerative factor affecting their job satisfaction. School management is also a more important factor of teacher job satisfaction than physical facilities of schools. Despite these similar factors affecting teacher job satisfaction, there were two distinctive features regarding teacher job satisfaction. One is that Bassac teachers seemed to be based on more instrumental satisfaction factors whereas Naga teacher seemed to be oriented in self-growth factors. In other words, Bassac teachers placed more emphasis on remunerative incentives. They did not mention about profession development as an element of their job satisfaction because most of them did not view teaching profession as their lifelong career. In contrast, Naga teachers mentioned more multiple satisfaction factors than Bassac teachers: in-service training, scholarships for further degrees, opportunities for teaching certificate, job status, and a sense of meaningful life as a teacher. In conclusion, it is evident that teacher job satisfaction is basically influenced by remunerative incentives such as salary level and welfare conditions. However, it is also closely intertwined with non-remunerative incentives such as school management, principal leadership, professional development, and a sense of meaningful life through teaching. That is, both remunerative and non-remunerative incentives interplay in determining teacher job satisfaction. Importantly, based on their different school conditions, either remunerative or non-remunerative incentive was more highlighted by teachers. Intuitively, this different job satisfaction between the two faculties seems to be closely related to the educational gap between the schools. These findings are sufficient as a first approximation for the understanding of teacher job satisfaction in the context of Cambodian NGO schools. Finally, as

teacher job satisfaction seems to form different teacher professionalism in the two schools, through a follow-up study the researcher will further analyse how teacher job satisfaction is associated with forming diverse discourses of teacher professionalism.

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